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caused by the disruption, they hastened to give the pieces to others, and this piece to me in 1831, on my return from Cape Cod, where I had been to observe the *annular* eclipse of Feb. 12, 1831.

3. A medal (supposed to be the first of the kind in the United States), given to Robert Treat Paine, Jr. (H. U. 1792), in January, 1794, for a poetical ode at the opening of the first theatre in Boston. Belonging to me since my father's death in November, 1811, at the age of nearly thirty-eight.

ROBERT TREAT PAINE (H. U. 1822)
(written with great difficulty).

JUNE 2, 1885.

Dr. CHANNING inquired if the word "meeting-house" was ever used in England before the year 1649, or in this country before 1633. He then spoke of the records of the Atherton Company as throwing light upon passages in the Trumbull Papers, which have recently been published by the Society.

Dr. GREEN made the following remarks: —

It is stated, in Nathaniel Ames's Almanack for 1731, that the appearance commonly known as the Northern Lights was first seen in New England during the year 1719. This statement is borne out by several early writers usually considered accurate and trustworthy. It is made with such circumstantial details that it carries a strong deal of probability and easily misleads the reader. The writer of the Almanack says: —

"Strange and wonderful have been the prodigious Effects of Nature of late Years, in the production of terrible Thunder & Lightning, violent Storms, tremendous Earthquakes, great Eclipses of the Luminaries, notable Configurations of the Planets, and strange *Phœnomena* in the Heavens: The *Aurora Borealis* (or Northern Twilight) is very unusual, and never seen in *New-England* (as I can learn) 'till about 11 Years ago: Tho' undoubtedly this *Phœnomenon* proceeds from the concatination of Causes. For hot and moist Vapours, exhaled from the Earth, and Kindled in the Air by Agitation, according to their motion may cause strange Appearances. I do not say that this is the true Cause of these Northern Lights; but that they are caused some such way must be granted: Nor must they be disregarded or look'd upon as ominous of neither Good nor Ill, because they are but the products of Nature; for the great GOD of Nature forewarns a sinful World of approaching Calamities, not only by Prophets, Apostles and Teachers, but also by the Elements and extraordinary Signs in the Heavens, Earth and Water."

The same account of this appearance is substantially given in "A Letter to a Certain Gentleman," &c., published at Boston in 1719, and reprinted in the second volume, first series, of the Society's Collections (pages 17–20). The writer, whose name is not given, speaks of it as "a wonderful *Meteor*," though from the description it was certainly a display of Northern Lights, and he gives the date as Dec. 11, 1719. This account is also confirmed by the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Trumbull in his Century sermon, delivered at North Haven, Connecticut, on Jan. 1, 1801, who says in a note that —

"The aurora borealis, or northern light is a new appearance, in the heavens, to this country, peculiar to the eighteenth century. It had been seen in Great Britain, especially in the north of Scotland, for many centuries past, but even in that country it had not appeared for eighty or an hundred years, until March 6, 1716. Its first appearance in New England was on the 17th of December, 1719."

Dr. Abiel Holmes, in "The Annals of America," follows Dr. Trumbull, and gives the same date. It is interesting to note that "The Boston News-Letter" of Dec. 21, 1719, does not mention the fact, nor does "The Boston Gazette," of which the first issue appeared also on that day. These were the only newspapers printed in the Colonies at that period; and they contained but little more than items taken from the English journals, which perhaps is the reason that no reference is made to the novelty.

The late Dr. Edward A. Holyoke, the centenarian physician of Salem, writes: —

"The first Aurora Borealis I ever saw, the Northern or rather Northeastern Sky appeared suffused by a dark blood-red coloured vapour, without any variety of different coloured rays. I have never since seen the like. This was about the year 1734. Northern Lights were then a novelty, and excited great wonder and terror among the vulgar."

This extract is taken from the Memoir of Dr. Holyoke, prepared in compliance with a vote of the Essex South District Medical Society, and published at Boston in the year 1829 (pages 77, 78).

It will be noticed that Dr. Trumbull gives March 6, 1716, as the first appearance of the Aurora Borealis in England. This

corresponds nearly with a note given in "The Poetical Works of William Collins" (London, 1827), printed in explanation of the following lines from his Ode on the popular superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland: —

"As Boreas threw his young Aurora forth,
In the first year of the first George's reign,
And battles rag'd in welkin of the North,
They mourn'd in air, fell, fell Rebellion slain!"

The note says: —

"By young Aurora, Collins undoubtedly meant the first appearance of the northern lights, which happened about the year 1715; at least it is most highly probable, from this peculiar circumstance, that no ancient writer whatever has taken any notice of them, nor even any one modern, previous to the above period" (page 114).

These several references seem to show that during the early part of the last century the Northern Lights were generally unknown in New England, a fact due perhaps to their rare occurrence. Probably also the continuity of tradition in regard to them was broken, owing to the want of newspapers and the lack of general letter-writing among the people.

Governor Winthrop in his History of New England, under the date of Jan. 18, 1643, makes the following entry, which undoubtedly refers to the phenomenon under consideration: —

"About midnight, three men, coming in a boat to Boston, saw two lights arise out of the water near the north point of the town cove, in form like a man, and went at a small distance to the town, and so to the south point, and there vanished away. They saw them about a quarter of an hour, being between the town and the governour's garden. The like was seen by many, a week after, arising about Castle Island and in one fifth of an hour came to John Gallop's point. . . . The 18th of this month two lights were seen near Boston, (as is before mentioned,) and a week after the like was seen again. A light like the moon arose about the N. E. point in Boston, and met the former at Nottles Island, and there they closed in one, and then parted, and closed and parted divers times, and so went over the hill in the island and vanished. Sometimes they shot out flames and sometime sparkles. This was about eight of the clock in the evening, and was seen by many. About the same time a voice was heard upon the water between Boston and Dorchester, calling out in a most dreadful manner, boy, boy, come away, come away: and it suddenly shifted from one

place to another a great distance, about twenty times. It was heard by divers godly persons. About 14 days after, the same voice in the same dreadful manner was heard by others on the other side of the town towards Nottles Island" (vol. ii. pp. 184, 185).

Chief Justice Sewall in his Diary writes under the date of Dec. 22, 1692, that —

> "Major General [Winthrop] tells me, that last night about 7 aclock, he saw 5 or 7 Balls of Fire that mov'd and mingled each with other, so that he could not tell them; made a great Light, but streamed not."

The last expression would seem to imply that he was familiar with appearances in the heavens which did stream. This must also refer to the same phenomenon.

In "The New-England Weekly Journal," Oct. 7, 1728, appears the following: —

> "On Wednesday Night last [Oct. 2] between 7 & eight a Clock, there was a bright appearance of the *Aurora Borealis*, which continued for some time and then dwindled away; the next Morning between 4 & 5 it appear'd again much brighter, when large streaks of Light extending themselves a vast way towards the *Zenith*, which on the approach of Day-light by degrees disappeared."

In the same newspaper of Nov. 10, 1729, it is recorded that —

> "On Wednesday Night last [Nov. 5] we had here a very bright appearance of the *Aurora Borealis*, or Northern Twilight, and we hear that the same was so remarkable at Rhode-Island that it was surprizing to the Inhabitants there."

These two extracts make no allusion to the novelty of the Aurora; but perhaps after a few years this had worn off.

In the Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (vol. ix. p. 101), is an elaborate chapter "On the Secular Periodicity of the Aurora Borealis," by Professor Joseph Lovering of Harvard College, in which the writer shows that its display in former times was much less frequent than it is at present.

Mr. Young presented from Miss Caroline Simpkins, of Boston, a little pamphlet containing an appeal in behalf of a Cent Society, which was formed in Boston on May 26, 1802, the